

A photograph of a wooden boardwalk leading to a lake in a pine forest. The boardwalk is made of light-colored wood and has railings on both sides. It leads from a dirt path in the foreground to a wooden platform overlooking the water. The forest is composed of tall, thin pine trees. The water is calm and reflects the sky. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

Volunteer Group Formed at Geneva State Forest

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Geneva State Forest, owned by the Alabama Forestry Commission, is located in extreme northwestern Geneva County in south Alabama. Encompassing 7,280 acres of primarily longleaf pine timber, it is the

largest of Alabama's state forests. For many years, this tract comprised the eastern third of what was then Covington Wildlife Management Area (WMA). After approximately 15,000 acres of corporate-owned lands were withdrawn from the Covington WMA system, only Geneva

State Forest (GSF) remained. Subsequently, through a cooperative agreement between the Alabama Forestry Commission and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, a "new" Geneva State Forest Wildlife Management Area was formed.

Even though timber management is the primary objective of GSF, it provides the public with much more than just wood products and revenue. In addition to hunting, GSF provides the public with a wide range of recreational opportunities. These include fishing, hiking, primitive camping, picnicking, bird watching, and trail riding. While the concept of multiple use is widely encouraged on public lands, it is inevitable that enthusiasts belonging to various user groups will vie for their share of limited time and space, and friction among user groups will develop. How these conflicts are managed can be the difference between a successfully managed public recreational area and one that is not successful.

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GSF had its own set of user group frictions and conflicts, so in 2009, Geneva State Forest Supervisor Chris Mead was tasked with finding a solution to this rapidly growing problem. He conceived the idea of establishing a stakeholders committee to include representatives of all user groups having an interest in the use and management of GSF, as well as its continued availability for recreational use. Mead believed this committee could serve two important purposes. First, and perhaps foremost, committee meetings could provide an opportunity for stakeholders to air their concerns and desires. This, he hoped, would promote an atmosphere of mutual understanding and allow better cooperation and more consideration among groups. Secondly, common ground could be found among stakeholder groups, and this group of volunteers could undertake projects beneficial to all stakeholders. Moreover, a nonprofit organization could access government grants and other sources of funding to support projects beyond the budgets of financially strapped state agencies.

Over the next three years, a new organization to address the needs of GSF became a reality. The Geneva State Forest Stakeholder Volunteers (GSFSV) was officially incorporated as an LLC in 2012. The purpose and objectives of the GSFSV are the following:

1. To educate and promote stewardship to all who use the land, forest, trails, water, and facilities at Geneva State Forest

For those interested in hunting at Geneva State Forest Management Area go to outdooralabama.com in the public lands section for more information on rules, regulations, seasons, and bag limits.



in a manner that promotes multiple-use recreation while conserving and protecting the forest ecosystem.

2. To promote the importance of Alabama's forestland and to teach effective environmental procedures to children and adults by working cooperatively with schools, groups, clubs, etc.
3. To provide citizens with an appreciation of the aesthetic, environmental, economic, and recreational benefits provided to the public by Geneva State Forest as well as to educate citizens of the importance of protecting and enhancing our natural areas.
4. To inform citizens of the benefits derived from sound forest management and to encourage support.



In addition to hunting, GSF provides the public with a wide range of recreational opportunities which include fishing, hiking, primitive camping, picnicking, bird watching, and trail riding.

5. To provide a forum for presentation, discussion, and exchange of ideas, concepts, and perspectives among the public and members of organizations, associations, professional groups, businesses, and government entities that will promote multiple use and stewardship of Geneva State Forest into perpetuity.
6. To develop a long-term recreation plan for Geneva State Forest that covers all approved activities.
7. To acquaint the local community with GSFSV endeavors through mail, email, notices, radio broadcasts, video, etc.
8. To develop a simple, informative map of Geneva State Forest marked with designated points of interest.



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The GSFSV has already made a real impact. Even before their official incorporation, the group hosted several landowner tours related to forest and wildlife management, as well as “classrooms in the forest” and field days for local schoolchildren. Since incorporation, the group has sponsored a haunted hayride, two trail rides to benefit charities, and both a guided horseback tour and a guided all-terrain vehicle tour of GSF with stationed speakers emphasizing the importance of both forest and wildlife management, as well as responsible outdoor recreation. Efforts currently are underway to acquire funding for an improved system of signs on GSF clarifying what recreational activities are permitted where.

What could be the most important accomplishment to date? Conflicts are greatly reduced as every group has a better perspec-

tive of the entire picture, and enjoyment of nature by the public has increased as well.

To learn more about the GSFSV, search for *Geneva State Forest Stakeholder Volunteers* on Facebook. 📌

